

Fall Color Report – October 21, 2021



Northern Illinois

Urban trees along the streets, parks and subdivisions in northern Illinois are showing signs of red to orange - especially the sunset maples - but colors may not be very bright. The hickory trees grouped together are showing signs of yellow to golden brown. Oaks in northwest Illinois are still not showing much colors.

While awaiting the first frost, red maples were turning red and orange in parts of northeast Illinois. Cottonwoods continue to yellow and brown, as do black walnuts. Sumac is currently deep red. Hickories are yellowing. Overall, there is still a lot of green in the woods.

Fall color progression stalled this week in a number of counties. Mulberry is yellowing; sassafras remains mottled gold and orange where not defoliated; sugar maples and some red maples are coloring up nicely. Persimmons are starting to blush apricot and muted yellow; oaks are sliding closer to the full extent of their glory but remain days or even weeks away from peak. In some areas, color is variable with many cultivars showing very strong color, with Shantung maple, hardy rubber tree, invasive pear, tulip tree, and many others coming into their own this week.



Central Illinois

Central Illinois neighborhoods and woodlands are still largely green with some yellow, but the leaves on a lot of trees have turned quickly and dropped due to the drought that extended from mid-summer to September.

In areas of north-central Illinois, woodland edges and roadsides are splashed with great reds, yellows and purples. Poison ivy, sumacs, dogwood species, Virginia creeper, and sassafras are showing different shades of red. Some scattered shag bark hickories have turned a bright yellow. The catalpas are both yellow and a nice light green as they start to turn. Common milkweed pods are starting to pop open with the light airborne seeds flying on the wind. The native grasses are changing shades edging toward the yellows and reddish-brown colors from their summer green. Many of the cottonwoods and black walnuts have lost their leaves. Elms, hackberry, mulberry, and redbuds are all showing various shades of yellow. In the urban landscape, selected varieties known for showing fall color are starting to pop.



Prairie grasses provide a nice contrast to the green leaves nearby. The cooler nights this week may boost the transition.



In east-central Illinois, some reporters have seen yellows and orange in the sugar maple and hickory trees come on quickly, turn brown, and the leaves drop. Some areas still have black walnuts showing yellow, with hints of the oaks starting to show some color.

In many west-central counties, pecan and some oak species remain predominantly green, while the foliage on most other area tree species continues to turn. Autumn color can now be found on hickory, walnut, silver maple, cottonwood, pawpaw, Osage orange, mulberry, catalpa, hackberry and buckeye trees. Sugar maples and ash are starting to show red, gold, purple and orange. Sumac and individual sassafras and dogwoods continue to redden. Peak colors should be arriving over the next week or two.

Elsewhere in western Illinois, there is still a lot of green, but some species saw the leaf color turned up a notch this week. Sumacs are throwing a lot of reds. Sassafras are starting to show more orange and red. Some maples are well on their way to turning yellow and orange. A few oaks have some scattered leaves turning red, yellow and bronze. Hickories are showing some yellow. Ash trees are showing a lot of purple (white ash) and yellow (green ash). Sweetgums are turning yellow and a lot of walnut trees are totally yellow or have lost all their leaves.

Southern Illinois

Like the rest of the state, the switch to fall color is behind the usual schedule, but some color is appearing. Sweet gum and sassafras are slowly turning yellow and red. White ash trees are slowly showing some purple hues. Some sumacs are turning red, with yellowing in tulip poplars, and cypress showing some bronzing.



Sugar maples have advanced from last week, showing yellow, orange, and red color. Hickories are a bit more yellow this week. Most oak species are still very green.

Farther south, bottomland trees, understory, and some overstory trees are starting to turn yellow and orange with a few reds and purples mixed in. Bright yellow colors are appearing in elm, pawpaw, maple, sycamore, basswood, hickory and tulip poplar trees. Red/purple colors are beginning to show in sassafras, black gum, and Virginia creeper vines.

In many locations, leaves have not changed much this week, with green still the predominant view and color peak likely coming in mid-November.